

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to support H.R. 2189, the Death in Custody Reporting Act of 2011.

The bill would require local, State, and Federal law enforcement agencies to report to the Department of Justice information about deaths of individuals which occur while in their custody. We've learned from history about how useful this information can be.

In the 1980s, there was an increased focus on conditions in State and local jails and prisons and the problem of prisoners dying in custody. The interest in oversight of this issue was generated primarily because of the rising tide of expensive wrongful death cases brought in relation to these deaths. Press reports in the 1990s concerning prison abuses and deaths of those incarcerated being attributed to suicide led Congress to develop legislation in response to this problem.

The Death in Custody Reporting Act of 2000 was enacted to require States to report quarterly to the Attorney General brief information regarding the death of any person in the process of arrest or who is otherwise in custody, including jails, prisons, and juvenile facilities.

That law expired in 2006, which led to the effort to reauthorize substantially the same requirements on States and to extend them to Federal agencies as well, which is what H.R. 2189 would do.

This extension, as the gentleman from Texas has mentioned, modifies the sanctions applied for those who do not comply with providing the information. It is expected that the information will be given and negotiations, rather than mandatory sanctions, should result in the information being available.

With detailed statistical data, policymakers at the local, State, and Federal levels can make informed judgments about the appropriate treatment of prisoners and develop ways to lower the prisoner death rate. In fact, since the focus on deaths in custody emerged in the 1980s and the enactment of the law in 2000, there have been significant declines in deaths of those in custody.

This bill is an important reaffirmation of the importance of requiring that States submit this information and expands this commitment to Federal law enforcement agencies as well.

This initiative has a history of strong bipartisan support; and I thank my colleagues from the other side of the aisle, particularly the gentleman from Texas, the chair of the Judiciary Committee, Mr. Smith, for bringing the bill to the floor today.

I urge my colleagues to support the bill, Mr. Speaker, and I yield back the balance of my time.